



San Diego City Attorney CASEY GWINN

NEWS RELEASE

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Grand Opening of Child Abuse Program, First in the Nation to House Children's Services within a Family Justice Center for Victims of Domestic Violence

Children's Hospital program moves to the nationally recognized San Diego Family Justice Center

San Diego, CA: Victims of family violence can now get help in one place not only for themselves but for their children as well. The Chadwick Center for Children & Families at Children's Hospital-San Diego and the San Diego Family Justice Center have come together in this new innovative partnership by moving the Family Violence Program at Children's Hospital to the Family Justice Center. Chief of Police Bill Lansdowne, City Attorney Casey Gwinn and Children's Hospital President & CEO Blair Sadler welcomed guests and community partners to celebrate the grand opening of the nation's first child abuse program within a family justice center for victims of domestic violence.

"We are for the first time bringing together the services of a nationally recognized child abuse program with a nationally recognized domestic violence program," said City Attorney Casey Gwinn.

Nearly 200 children a month are expected to receive services from the Family Violence Program at the Family Justice Center. The program will offer prevention and intervention services to abused women and their children. The staff is comprised of eleven advocates and trauma counselors who will provide individual counseling and group therapy to children who have been abused or who have witnessed domestic violence in their homes. Advocates work with mothers and their children with the goal of attaining safety through assistance such as accessing restraining orders and accompanying family to criminal, and juvenile court proceedings, including mediation. The therapy program offers treatment related to trauma from verbal, emotional, physical and sexual abuse. In addition therapy dealing with issues such as teen relationship violence, substance abuse related to domestic violence and depression will also be provide.

The Executive Director of the Chadwick Center for Children & Families, San Diego's nationally recognized child advocacy center, said bringing members of his staff to the Family Justice Center is the next step in San Diego's national vision to bring together child abuse and domestic violence professionals in a coordinated system that supports the needs of children and their families who are struggling with the risks and dangers of violence in the home.

"By co-locating professionals in a one-stop facility we can more effectively gather accurate facts, provide protection, help reduce the long term effects upon children and hold those responsible for the abuse accountable," said Charles Wilson.

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Verna Griffin Tabor, Executive Director of the Center for Community Solutions says providing services to children at the Family Justice Center will further expand the effectiveness of the Family Justice Center. Ultimately, the Chadwick Center and the Family Justice Center hope to see fully integrated services for all victims of family violence including services for victims of elder abuse, sexual assault, child abuse and domestic violence.

“Today, we are moving forward to meet not only the needs of adult victims of domestic violence but the needs of victims of child physical and sexual abuse,” said Police Chief Lansdowne.

The San Diego Family Justice Center opened its doors on October 10, 2002 at 707 Broadway in downtown San Diego. It is the first facility in the nation to house the entire Domestic Violence Units of a prosecutor’s office and police department. The Center has served more than 9,000 clients in the last two years with 25 on-site partnering agencies including both public government entities and private non-profit social service agencies.

Victims are urged to come forward to seek help for themselves and their children. The new children’s program and the many community services of the Family Justice Center are located on the second floor. The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. In addition, the Center now operates a night legal clinic on Wednesdays from 5 p.m. – 8 p.m in a partnership with UCSD’s Paralegal Program, Center for Community Solutions and the YWCA.

San Diego’s innovative family violence intervention and prevention work has led to a steady decline in domestic violence homicides in the City since 1985 when partnerships began between domestic violence shelters, the City Attorney, the District Attorney, and the San Diego Police Department. In 1985, San Diego experienced 30 domestic violence homicides. By 1990, there were 22 domestic violence homicides. By 2002, there were eleven domestic violence deaths. In 2003, there were nine domestic violence homicides. In the last 12 months, there have been 5 domestic violence deaths in the City of San Diego.

Most significantly, since its opening in 2002, no client seeking services at the San Diego Family Justice Center has died. “Our goal is to eliminate domestic violence homicides,” said City Attorney Casey Gwinn, referring to the Family Justice Center’s “Aiming for Zero” campaign to stop domestic violence deaths in the City of San Diego.

City Manager Lamont Ewell credits the incredible partnerships between the community-based agencies and the City’s Police Department and City Attorney’s Office for the continuing decline in domestic violence deaths. “We will not be satisfied until every family in San Diego is free from violence and abuse, and we are moving forward together toward that day, “ said Ewell.

Gwinn praised the work of the 120 professionals at the Family Justice Center who everyday meet the needs of victims and their children, and he urged all those experiencing violence and abuse to come to the Family Justice Center for help. The Family Justice Center operates a toll free info line for victims to receive non-crisis information (1-866-933-HOPE) and the Center works closely with the County Domestic Violence Hotline (1-888-DVLINKS). Each month approximately 500 victims and children seek services and over 300 professionals meet with other professionals at the Family Justice Center. Plus, over 3,000 phone calls are received at the Family Justice Center’s toll free number.

The current on-site partners at the nationally recognized Family Justice Center include: The Domestic Violence Units of the San Diego City Attorney’s Office and the San Diego Police Department, County Adult Protective Services, Cal Western School of Law’s Legal Internship Program, Center for Community Solutions’ Temporary Restraining Order Clinic, Family Violence Program of Children’s Hospital’s Chadwick Center for Children & Families, Homestart, Military (Navy & Marine Corps), San Diego Deaf Mental Health Services,

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San Diego District Attorney's Office, San Diego Domestic Violence Council, San Diego Fire Department's Chaplain's Program, County Probation Department, San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, Sharp Grossmont HealthCare's Forensic Medical Unit, City of San Diego's Teen Court, Travelers Aid, UCSD's Paralegal Program, Union of Pan Asian Communities' Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC), YWCA's Night Legal Clinic, the San Diego Family Justice Center Foundation, Camp Hope and the President's Family Justice Center's Initiative Technical Assistance Program.

The Family Justice Center has been recognized locally, nationally, and internationally for its innovative service model. This month the National League of Cities selected the San Diego Family Justice Center for one of the prestigious Howland National Achievement Gold Awards to recognize the incredible public-private partnership which includes both the Family Justice Center and Camp Hope, the first dedicated camp of its kind in America to focus on the needs of domestic violence victims and their children.

For more information about the San Diego Family Justice Center or to find out how to volunteer, call 619-533-6000, or visit our website at www.familyjusticecenter.org

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